

The Functions of Archaizing in Byzantium

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The uses that the Byzantines made of their past can be examined through three questions. First, what past did they use? The simplest answer, and one that is legitimate, is that they used all of it, at least all to which they had access. Byzantium could borrow from its pagan Greek heritage, from its pagan and Christian Roman heritage, from its early Christian or patristic heritage, or from any part of its own Byzantine heritage. This may seem self-evident, but in fact Byzantine studies have always tended to stress the use the Byzantines made of a particular past, what we commonly call the Classical Past, Greece during the Golden Age, Rome during the early Imperial period, and, somewhat less often, the age of the early Church Fathers, and there has been a tendency to ignore the manner and degree to which the Byzantines used their own past. The reasons for a focus on the so-called Classical Past is not difficult to understand. We Byzantine historians, who for the most part have the roots of our training planted firmly in the soil of ancient Greece and Rome, admire classical antiquity no less than the Byzantine intellectual himself did. And while we may freely admit that what the Byzantine intellectual saw in antiquity is not quite identical to what we appreciate in antiquity, this, nevertheless, creates a link between ourselves and the people we study, a point of commonality that allows us to approach what in many other ways is an alien world.¹ For instance, it is this link that allows us to find value in Byzantine literature.

Not only do we prefer to direct our attention to the particular periods within the Byzantine cultural legacy that the Byzantines themselves drew upon, but we also tend to focus our attention on those kinds of activities that most prominently exhibit the antique heritage, specifically, the histories and the polemical and rhetorical writings of our kin, Byzantine historians and intellectuals. This is as understandable as it is deceptive, because such writing, high literature, is only one aspect of literature, which in turn is only one aspect of written communication. Even limiting our purview to written communication is rather restricting because other fields of Byzantine cultural expression, such as political and ecclesiastical forms, as well as, of course, art, display the Byzantine attachment to their heritage no less than their writing.

If we can agree that the so-called "classicizing" of Byzantine high literature is only one aspect of a much broader phenomenon involving the peculiar manner in which the Byzantines employed their heritage in varied forms of expression – which I shall call "archaizing" – we can then ask a second question, in what ways and to what extent did they draw upon this heritage? Here we have to consider quite a number of factors. For example, in any particular period, authors and artists, as well as governmental and church officials, utilized different aspects of the heritage; different historical periods could be called upon and different elements within that period could be emphasized. In other words, the selection procedure operated both chronologically and topically.

¹ See R. BOLGAR, *The Classical Tradition: Legend and Reality*, in: *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, Birmingham 1981, 7-19.

This produced a complex fabric of cultural evolution that renews and re-echoes patterns, the unraveling of which requires great scholarly effort.

While this work is being carried out, we may yet ask a third question, what is the function of this archaizing? This is the question I would like to address here, to examine both the causes and effects of archaism, both the reasons why the Byzantines archaized and the effect this archaizing had upon Byzantine society. Before I mention some concrete cases and suggest some approaches for considering these issues, I should first make clear what I mean by archaism. The word "archaism" has two fundamental senses. On the one hand, to archaize is to imitate or retain that which is old; on the other, it is to imitate or retain that which is obsolete. It is not difficult to see that the latter is only a special case of the former, so that "to archaize" is to hold onto old things in language, literature, art, government, religion, customs, and so on. This phenomenon is found in all societies to a greater or lesser extent, and we do see how tenaciously man holds onto the old in our own world, particularly in the context of modern states that have tried to eradicate the "old" from vast areas of human activity. If we say that societies manifesting a greater attachment to the "old" are conservative, and those displaying much less of an attachment or a hostility to the "old" are revolutionary, then Byzantium was a conservative society. But this is obvious, and in any event many societies have been conservative in the sense of being deeply involved with the "old."² Yet, what distinguishes Byzantium from other societies is the degree to which Byzantium was attached to its past, to cultural forms that were antiquated.

Since it is very difficult, if not impossible, to produce anything completely contemporary, every product of Byzantine civilization, like all products of human society, archaized to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of determining which kind of works archaized and which did not. Rather, a more meaningful approach is to distinguish works by the degree of archaizing they exhibit. Among the works displaying the most archaizing, scholars have directed most of their attention to the literary products of a very small elite group of intellectuals. In these works the dominant type of archaizing is called "classicizing", that is, the act of borrowing from the pagan Greek heritage, and it is this classicizing that defines such literary products as literature in the so-called "high style." The writings of these intellectuals, primarily histories, essays, letters, and poetry, imitate antique forms in their formal structure, syntax and vocabulary. They make extensive use of quotations from classical sources and draw on classical allusions and imagery. They strike us as elegant, sublime and refined, stilted, pedantic and artificial.³

Other literature, such as saints' *Lives*, along with devotional poetry, the liturgies, homilies and theological writings, displays its own intense form of archaizing. The stock *topoi*, the Biblical and patristic quotations, the scriptural allusions, even the imitation of Biblical syntax, are all part of an archaizing that owes nothing to antique

"classicizing" and reflects an alternate tradition in Byzantium. Still other works do not so much adopt an archaic form or syntax but include archaic and often obsolete information. Here we have the great tenth-century encyclopedic works, such as Constantine Porphyrogenetos' *On the Themes*, and official legal compilations, such as Leo VI's *Basilika*, which incorporate a substantial amount of archaic social, political and geographical information. Similar to these are the truly antiquarian works, such as Harmenopoulos' *Hexabiblos*, an unofficial fourteenth-century compendium of centuries-old laws, next to useless for the historian of the fourteenth century, and Pseudo-Kodinos' contemporary treatise *On the Offices* of the empire, a work in which the distinction between the contemporary and the obsolete is almost unfathomable.

Straddling the line between the high-style literary texts that emphasize a classical Greek heritage and the compendia that emphasize a Roman and earlier Byzantine heritage are the documentary sources, which display a true eclecticism in their archaizing. While the syntax of the *prooimia*, or prefaces, of such documents is a classicizing high style, the metaphors and quotations are scriptural and patristic. On the other hand, the bodies of these documents are filled with formulaic expressions from the Byzantine past with an occasional reference to Roman legal and administrative concepts. Finally, there are the non-literary aspects of Byzantine culture that exhibit a great deal of archaizing: the fine arts, which remained true to a Byzantine Christian heritage peppered with influences from the hellenistic past, the coinage, and the organization of both ecclesiastical and state administration, the latter with its particular attachment to late Roman concepts.

Scholars have offered a variety of reasons to explain why the Byzantines archaized, or more specifically, why they classicized, since classicism has been the focus of most scholarly treatments of the Byzantines' use of their heritage. To survey these is to underscore the difficulties in approaching the issue of archaizing. On the one hand, the reasons given by scholars span an enormous range of possibilities, and on the other, we must remind ourselves that there is a world of difference between the personal reasons why any particular Byzantine may have archaized (or classicized) and the functions of archaizing in Byzantine society. At one end of the spectrum are those scholars who minimize the significance of classicizing for Byzantine society, who approach the classicizing of Byzantine authors almost apologetically, and almost, though never quite, suggest that classicizing was nothing more than a pedantic literary game.⁴ More usual is the opinion that the attachment to the past is somehow a sign of nostalgia or a means of escaping reality.⁵ Other scholars have argued that classicizing was a way for a Byzantine writer to make his writing seem more important, a way to give pleasure to his readers, and a way to create social cohesion among the intellectual elite.⁶ One scholar has even suggested that antique reminiscences could be used by intellectuals as a means of avoiding government control over their work.⁷ Others have

² Or, as H. HUNGER writes, tradition was stronger than innovation: *The Classical Tradition in Byzantine Literature*, in: Byzantium and the Classical Tradition, 35.

³ See, e.g., H. HUNGER, *On the Imitation (Mimesis) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23-24 (1969-70) 15-38, and idem, *The Reconstruction and Conception of the Past in Literature*, in: 17th International Byzantine Congress, Washington 1986, 507-22; C. MANGO, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror*, Oxford 1975; and G. MORAVCSIK, *Klassizismus in der byzantinischen Geschichtsschreibung*, in: *Polychronion*, Festschrift F. Dölger z. 75. Geburtstag, Heidelberg 1966, 366-77.

⁴ Cf. R. SCOTT, *The Classical Tradition in Byzantine Historiography*, in: Byzantium and the Classical Tradition, 62.

⁵ Cf. M. CHATZIDAKIS, *Classicisme et tendances populaires au XIV^e s.: les recherches sur l'évolution du style*, in: XIV^e International congrès des études byzantines: Rapports, Bucharest 1971, 122.

⁶ H.-G. BECK, *Byzantinistik heute*, Berlin 1977, 17-19.

⁷ HUNGER, *Classical Tradition*, 45, and idem, *Klassizistische Tendenzen in der byzantinischen Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts*, in: XIV^e International congrès des études byzantines: Rapports, Bucharest 1971, 92, 94-5; I. ŠEVČENKO, *Society and Intellectual Life in the Fourteenth Century*, in:

found political as well as nationalistic motivations in the revival of antique forms. The idea that classicizing, particularly in late Byzantium, fostered Greek nationalism is common in the scholarship.⁸ Others speak of a desire to use the knowledge and experience of the past to benefit or to make sense of the present.⁹

Could classicizing, and by extension, archaizing, have been both a means of escaping reality and a tool for understanding the world? Could it have been both a means of avoiding governmental control and a method for legitimizing the rule of an emperor? One way to answer these questions is to approach the issue of archaizing in a slightly roundabout way, by considering first the areas of literary endeavor that display the least archaizing. In Byzantine studies it has become common to categorize a work of literature into one of two or three groups based on the amount of classicizing it exhibits.¹⁰ Thus, what we call "high" literature (for example, the letters of an eleventh-century intellectual like Michael Psellos) is permeated by a good imitation of classical vocabulary, syntax, grammar, themes, allusions and so forth. Works in the so-called "low" style (such as a fourteenth-century chronicle like the *Chronicle of the Morea*) are those that show little or no classicizing. However valuable this categorization is for the study of Byzantine literature, it is not very useful for a study of archaizing.

Saints' *Lives* illustrate the problem. Most saints' *Lives* are regarded as literature in the "low" style because as a rule they exhibit very little classicizing. When they do, it is usually found in a tedious preface in the high style, the purpose of which presumably was to assert the hagiographer's familiarity with classicism (though indeed he may have cribbed the preface from another *Life*). But for the most part, since hagiographers wrote for an audience or readership composed primarily of the unlearned, their Greek had to be simple and direct, avoiding classicizing grammar and syntax, as well as classical allusions which would be lost on their audiences. Yet saints' *Lives* archaize no less than the high-style literature of the Byzantine literati. The author of a hagiographical work followed a series of conventions in composing his work, fitting it out with the proper *topoi* and the proper scriptural and patristic quotations, and altering and adding "facts" so that the saint could take his rightful place amid a panoply of Christian heroes. The Greek of the saint's *Life* tended to model itself on patristics or the New Testament, and the allusions were scriptural, drawing on a long tradition that conjured up a range of meanings, of common points of reference between the author and his audience, an audience that might have been ignorant of Plutarch, but not of the Christian tradition.

The point is that the distinction between more and less archaizing is not the distinction between literature in a high style and literature in a low style. Indeed, even

though all high literature archaizes heavily, some low literature does so as well. Rather, the literature that archaizes the least is actually the literature that scholars are frequently hesitant to regard as literature at all, such as certain chronicles, particularly the short chronicles, and a few, rare essays or treatises written in down-to-earth language (such as the *Strategikon* of Kekaumenos). Although even these, if compared to a hypothetical Byzantine laundry list, would display strong archaizing tendencies, they are the least archaizing of all literary genres.

To find written material displaying even less archaizing we need to leave the field of literature and consider other types of writing: for example, critical communications, such as the secret letters Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos sent to his nephew in 1327 during a stage of the civil wars between Andronikos and his grandson; specific portions of documentary sources, such as lists of peasants, delineations of property boundaries, the specific terms of land transfers, and an occasional new law; and certain technical writings, such as military treatises and scientific works. Now it must be emphasized that all of these sources do indeed archaize; if they did not, it would be impossible to categorize them as letters, documents or treatises. Nevertheless, they show the least archaizing (and the most contemporary consciousness) of all preserved literary material. As for why, the secret letters of Andronikos II are a good focus. These letters appear in the memoirs of John Kantakouzenos, a writer whose usual tendency to "dress up" in classical garb some of the most mundane speeches and communications suggests that his transcription of these letters is faithful to their original wording. First, we might say that the letters, being secret and certainly not intended for publication, were drawn up without concern for archaistic flourishes, without the embellishment of antique reminiscences and inscrutable verb forms. But this explanation is not quite satisfactory. Given the tradition of archaizing both in Byzantine epistolography and in imperial pronouncements, the omission of archaism in an imperial letter should be considered a deliberate act. But for what purpose? In the words of Thor ŠEVČENKO, who cites these letters, "when the very survival of the old emperor and his party was at stake, plain talk was considered in order."¹¹ The Byzantines were well aware that the use of archaizing language created subtle and intellectually satisfying "levels of meaning", something they frequently regarded as a positive characteristic.¹² But for Emperor Andronikos at this critical moment the situation demanded clarity of thought and expression. He could not afford to have his words misinterpreted, and so he employed "plain talk" – language to a great extent free from archaism in style and content, language with one specific intended level of meaning.

This desire to produce a single contemporary level of meaning – what I would call "specificity" of meaning – is, I think, the key to understanding why some literary material avoids archaism. In fiscal records and in mathematical treatises, in legal rulings and in private contracts, subtlety and several, possibly ambiguous, levels of meaning are not virtues. In these the Byzantines sought precision of expression in order to avoid misinterpretation. Even in the chronicles, that literary genre exhibiting the least archaizing, while other factors do certainly come into play, we see an emphasis on specificity, the comprehensibility of a single contemporary reality.

¹¹ ŠEVČENKO, *Levels*, 307.

¹² M. MULLETT, *The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter*, in: *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition*, 78, 81 (citing ŠEVČENKO in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* [1954] 41-59), and 87.

XIV^e International congrès des études byzantines: Rapports, Bucharest 1971, 25, and idem, *Levels of Style in Byzantine Literature*, *Jahrb. der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31/1 (1981) 302.

⁸ E. KNITZINGER, *The Hellenistic Heritage in Byzantine Art Reconsidered*, *Jahrb. der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 31/2 (1981) 672; Ch. DIEHL, *Byzantium: Greatness and Decline*, New Brunswick, N.J. 1957, 235-36; A. VACALOPoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation, 1204-1461*, New Brunswick, N.J. 1970, esp. 46-54.

⁹ DIEHL, *Byzantium*, 250; A. KAZHDAN - G. CONSTABLE, *People and Power in Byzantium*, Washington, D.C. 1982, 114-21; A. KAZHDAN - A. EPSTEIN, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Berkeley, Calif. 1985, 139.

¹⁰ See ŠEVČENKO, *Levels*, passim, and idem, *Three Byzantine Literatures: A Layman's Guide*, Brookline, Mass. 1985.

If the common motivational thread that runs through the written works that display the least archaizing is the desire to communicate a single specific contemporary reality, then the analogous thread woven into the fabric of the most heavily archaizing literature is the desire for permanence, timelessness and continuity. A historian such as Anna Komnene or John Kantakouzenos models a passage after a Thucydides or a Plutarch, linking his present with the past and ultimately anticipating a reader in the future linking the author's present with the author's past. Encyclopedic works, such as Constantine Porphyrogennetos' *On the Themes*, and antiquarian works, such as Constantine Harmenopoulos' *Hexabiblos*, display this same characteristic, and though modern historians reel before the problems created by their baffling pastiche of contemporary, nearly contemporary and obsolete information, this archaizing gave continuity and permanent meaning to the world of these writers. In non-literary areas as well, we see the tendency toward timelessness and permanence manifesting itself as archaism. Works of art appropriated the style of an earlier age, such as in the tenth-century Joshua Roll in the Vatican, which depicts Byzantine soldiers in the same dress as the seventh-century so-called David plates,¹³ and in the late eleventh-century classicizing mosaics of the monastery of Daphni outside Athens. They also utilized the content of earlier works, such as in the fourteenth-century miniatures from the *Alexander Romance*, which depict ancient soldiers in late Byzantine armor. In Byzantine administration the retention of antiquated titles shows this same drift toward timelessness. In this area, more than some others, the excessive reliance on the permanent led to a conscious blurring of the distinction between past and present, while in art, the desire for permanence led to permanent truths.

If works that show the most archaizing place their emphasis on permanence and those that show the least archaizing place their emphasis on specificity of meaning, other parallels follow. The desire for permanence highlights the relationship of the past and future to the present by placing greater stress on the form of a work. On the other hand, the desire for specificity is a present-oriented function stressing content over form. This line of thought can be taken a step further. The emphasis on permanence, on ties to the past and on form over content, can be viewed as a manifestation of the much broader Byzantine concept of *taxis*, or order, which saw earthly institutions as mirroring the divine order of heaven. Similarly, the emphasis on specificity, the present, and content is an expression of the Byzantine concept of *oikonomia*, or dispensation, which represented the spirit of compromise and of accommodation with the present, real world no matter how unpleasant the conditions of this world might be.¹⁴

Of course permanence and specificity are neither antithetical nor mutually exclusive characteristics. Both qualities are found in almost every literary product of the Byzantine era, as they are found in almost every human product in every era. Thus, when Niketas Choniates employed a heavily classicizing style to describe the Latin conquest of Constantinople, the desires for permanence and for specificity of meaning were both satisfied. For the educated Byzantine reader a contemporary reality could at

the same time be understood as an event *sui generis*, as well as an event elevated and legitimized as a newly installed part of an honored heritage. Yet, it is also evident that the impulse toward permanence was higher than that toward specificity in Choniates' hierarchy of motives. Classicizing language was a worthy end in its own right, but a contemporary event only acquired its full meaning when described with such language. The tendency for the Byzantines to place much greater stress on permanence, on *taxis*, than on specificity and *oikonomia*, is what gave the Byzantine world its particular character.

Finally, we turn to the effects of archaizing. It does indeed seem that the form of archaizing we call "classicizing," cultivated by relatively small groups of Byzantine *literati*, while motivated by any number of individual dispositions, did result in a stratification of Byzantine cultural life, isolating intellectuals from their contemporaries and limiting the impact of their work on Byzantine society. Yet, at the same time, as Ihor ŠEVČENKO and Herbert HUNGER have suggested, their archaizing afforded them the means to survive within the autocratic environment of Byzantium by producing group solidarity within the class of intellectuals and by providing them with a sphere of activity over which they had complete control. Similarly, while the archaizing of these intellectuals did serve to foster a certain nascent Greek nationalism, there is no evidence that during the Byzantine era their ideas had any repercussions beyond the narrow circles of the intelligentsia and their aristocratic patrons.¹⁵

However, it is not only within the cultural, intellectual and social spheres of Byzantine intellectuals that we find the effects of archaizing. When all is said, most archaizing in Byzantium, from merely a quantitative point of view, did not occur within the circles of the *literati*, but in imperial ceremony, administration, coinage, seals and ideology, on the one hand, and in saints' *Lives*, liturgy, church administration, religious art and architecture, and theology, on the other. In the former case, archaizing maintained the imperial idea, the consciousness that the empire was somehow still Roman, this despite centuries of transformations in social, economic and even political forms. Fourteenth-century Byzantium was no Roman Empire; yet archaizing, supported by the leadership in order to establish and maintain their legitimacy, nourished and perpetuated the Roman myth.¹⁶

But even this was not the most significant area of archaizing. Rather, we must look toward Christianity in all its facets for the area of life in which archaizing was most dominant and determinant. Christianity had a greater influence than the Roman or classical traditions ever had. At one level, Christianity fostered group solidarity no less than the classical heritage. Provincial monks and ecclesiastics acquired their status and identity through their knowledge of the Christian heritage. The language and symbols of Christianity created a cultural solidarity that transcended and permeated all social and economic classes and was ever-present in one form or another, even at the popular level. It is the archaizing aspect of tradition that provides any tradition with the capacity to endure, to acquire permanence in a society. Yet, for a tradition to persist despite all vicissitudes, it requires a diffuse reception within a society. In Byzantium only the Christian tradition had a sufficiently broad base.

¹³ C. MANGO, *Discontinuity with the Classical Past in Byzantium*, in: Byzantium and the Classical Tradition, 51.

¹⁴ On these concepts, see H. AHRWEILER, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin*, Paris 1975. 276 *Taxis* and *oikonomia* have parallels in the "universal" and "historical" of Byzantine art.

¹⁵ MANGO, *Discontinuity*, 49.

¹⁶ For understanding the conceptual world of Byzantium, MANGO, *Discontinuity*, 51-53, emphasizes the importance of "low-brow" literature and its slant toward the Roman heritage. 277

I shall conclude on a somewhat self-centered note. It seems that the archaizing of the Byzantine intellectual, while having a limited effect on his own society, has had important consequences for Byzantinists. First, on the positive side, the retreat to the past and the utilization of their antique heritage to secure their place in the present led Byzantine intellectuals to preserve the classical heritage. This ultimately carried them into the field of textual criticism for which we and the scholars of the Renaissance rightly should be grateful. However, there is another side to such activities. A Byzantine historian studies Byzantium to learn about Byzantium, not the classical world, and seeks to define Byzantium as a distinct civilization, not as some ragged remnant and cheap imitation of antiquity. And for these ends, the archaizing of Byzantium's intellectuals has presented and continues to present formidable obstacles. What should be our best sources of direct information about Byzantine history and society – the histories, the treatises, the laws, the letters – are those most cloaked in this veil of archaism. As we seek to determine the main lines of continuity and change in Byzantine civilization, there are times when we become infuriated with the Byzantine intellectual, when it seems he is taking elaborate pains to hide behind his heritage so that we will not know his society. In the words of Alexander KAZHDAN and Giles CONSTABLE, "The Byzantines always exaggerated their dependence on Antiquity, and whether new forms and relations were concealed under antiquated legal terms must continually be questioned".¹⁷ Cyril MANGO has made this point even more strongly. "We have been misled," he writes, "by words that meant one thing in antiquity and another thing in the Middle Ages; and we shall continue to be so misled as long as we regard Byzantium in terms of ancient 'survivals'. It is no easy matter to reconstruct the reality of Byzantine life, but we must endeavor to do so with a mind free from classical preconceptions if we are to understand this civilization as it was, not as we would like it to have been."¹⁸

Beobachtungen zur Literarästhetik der Byzantiner

Einige byzantinische Zeugnisse zu Metrik und Rhythmus

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In weiten Kreisen auch innerhalb der Zunft der Byzantinisten genießt die byzantinische Literatur keinen sehr guten Ruf, und vielfach mißt man ihr immer noch nur wegen ihres Quellenwertes eine gewisse Bedeutung zu. Das ist in der letzten Zeit etwas besser geworden,¹ und wenn Barry BALDWIN einmal feststellt, er vertrete "the unfashionable view that, whilst not full of great masterpieces, Byzantine literature is worth reading for its own sake",² dann mag diese Ansicht zwar immer noch "unfashionable" sein, BALDWIN steht aber damit keineswegs allein. Wie auch immer, byzantinische Literatur verdient es, wie jede Literatur es im Prinzip verdient, nicht als Spiegel von irgend etwas verwertet, sondern als eine der Manifestationen einer Kultur gewürdigt zu werden.

Es geht um das literarisch Schöne.³ Dabei ist es nicht entscheidend, ob es sich um Werke von zeitloser Gültigkeit handelt, die auch uns heute unmittelbar ansprechen (solche alle räumlichen und zeitlichen Grenzen der Wirksamkeit sprengenden Werke hat die byzantinische Literatur kaum zu bieten; sie machen allerdings auch in den anderen Literaturen nur einen quantitativ minimalen Anteil aus). Wesentlich ist es vielmehr zu erfassen, was von den Autoren selbst angestrebt und von ihrem Publikum als schön empfunden wurde.⁴ Um diese Kriterien zu finden, sind grundsätzlich zwei Wege zu beschreiten, einerseits die Analyse der erhaltenen Werke und andererseits die Auffindung und Interpretation theoretischer Aussagen. Diese beiden Schritte ersetzen einander nicht, sind aber sehr wohl geeignet, einander sinnvoll zu ergänzen.

¹ M. MULLETT, *Dancing with Deconstructionists in the Gardens of the Muses: New Literary History vs? Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 14 (1990) 258-275, nennt eine Reihe von Indizien dafür, daß in den letzten Jahren "a wind of change has been blowing through the study of Byzantine literature" (a.O. 260), wobei sie mit Recht den Arbeiten von A. Kazhdan einen besonderen Stellenwert zumißt; gleichzeitig konstatiert sie allerdings – auch das mit Recht – das nach wie vor große Defizit, ja weitgehende Fehlen literaturtheoretischer Ansätze in der Beschäftigung mit der byzantinischen Literatur.

² B. BALDWIN, *An Anthology of Byzantine Poetry*, Amsterdam 1985, V.

³ P. MAAS, *Das Schöne in der byzantinischen Literatur*, Deuxième Congrès Int. des études byzantines, Belgrade 1927. Comptes-rendus. Belgrad 1929, 26f. (nachgedruckt in: P. MAAS, *Kleine Schriften*, München 1973, 237). Im allgemeinen hat sich die moderne byzantinische Literaturforschung von ästhetischen Problemen ferngehalten und dadurch den Anschein erweckt, als ob es hier an ästhetischen Werten fehle. Maas sieht die Ursache dafür schon bei den Byzantinern selbst; sie hätten "das Schöne in ihrer Literatur nicht nach Gebühr gewürdigt und somit nicht jene Tradition geschaffen, an die das moderne Urteil anzuschließen pflegt".

⁴ Zu dem wichtigen Problemkreis der Interrelation von Autor und Publikum in Byzanz sei – neben den übrigen in meinem Moskauer Referat (*Zur kommunikativen Funktion byzantinischer Gedichte*, in: XVIII Meždunarodnyj kongress vizantinistov. Plenarnye doklady. Moskva 1991, 415-432) erwähnten Arbeiten von HUNGER, KAZHDAN und anderen – insbesondere auf die immer wieder lesenswerten Überlegungen von H.-G. BECK zu Gültigkeit und Verbindlichkeit der byzantinischen Literatur (*Das literarische Schaffen der Byzantiner. Wege zu seinem Verständnis*, Österr. Ak. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl., Sitzungsber. 294,4, Wien 1974) verwiesen.

¹⁷ KAZHDAN – CONSTABLE, *People and Power*, 121.

¹⁸ C. MANGO, *Daily Life in Byzantium*, Jahrb. der österreichischen Byzantinistik 31/1 (1981) 353.

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Einige byzantinische Zeugnisse zu Metrik und Rhythmik

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In weiten Kreisen auch innerhalb der Zunft der Byzantinisten genießt die byzantinische Literatur keinen sehr guten Ruf, und vielfach mißt man ihr immer noch nur wegen ihres Quellenwertes eine gewisse Bedeutung zu. Das ist in der letzten Zeit etwas besser geworden,¹ und wenn Barry BALDWIN einmal feststellt, er vertrete "the unfashionable view that, whilst not full of great masterpieces, Byzantine literature is worth reading for its own sake",² dann mag diese Ansicht zwar immer noch "unfashionable" sein, BALDWIN steht aber damit keineswegs allein. Wie auch immer, byzantinische Literatur verdient es, wie jede Literatur es im Prinzip verdient, nicht als Spiegel von irgend etwas verwertet, sondern als eine der Manifestationen einer Kultur gewürdigt zu werden.

Es geht um das literarisch Schöne.³ Dabei ist es nicht entscheidend, ob es sich um Werke von zeitloser Gültigkeit handelt, die auch uns heute unmittelbar ansprechen (solche alle räumlichen und zeitlichen Grenzen der Wirksamkeit sprengenden Werke hat die byzantinische Literatur kaum zu bieten; sie machen allerdings auch in den anderen Literaturen nur einen quantitativ minimalen Anteil aus). Wesentlich ist es vielmehr zu erfassen, was von den Autoren selbst angestrebt und von ihrem Publikum als schön empfunden wurde.⁴ Um diese Kriterien zu finden, sind grundsätzlich zwei Wege zu beschreiten, einerseits die Analyse der erhaltenen Werke und andererseits die Auffindung und Interpretation theoretischer Aussagen. Diese beiden Schritte ersetzen einander nicht, sind aber sehr wohl geeignet, einander sinnvoll zu ergänzen.

¹ M. MULLETT, *Dancing with Deconstructionists in the Gardens of the Muses: New Literary History vs? Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 14 (1990) 258–275, nennt eine Reihe von Indizien dafür, daß in den letzten Jahren "a wind of change has been blowing through the study of Byzantine literature" (a.O. 260), wobei sie mit Recht den Arbeiten von A. Kazhdan einen besonderen Stellenwert zumißt; gleichzeitig konstatiert sie allerdings – auch das mit Recht – das nach wie vor große Defizit, ja weitgehende Fehlen literaturtheoretischer Ansätze in der Beschäftigung mit der byzantinischen Literatur.

² B. BALDWIN, *An Anthology of Byzantine Poetry*, Amsterdam 1985, V.

³ P. MAAS, *Das Schöne in der byzantinischen Literatur*, Deuxième Congrès Int. des études byzantines, Belgrade 1927. *Compte-rendu*. Belgrad 1929, 26f. (nachgedruckt in: P. MAAS, *Kleine Schriften*, München 1973, 237): "Im allgemeinen hat sich die moderne byzantinische Literaturforschung von ästhetischen Problemen ferngehalten und dadurch den Anschein erweckt, als ob es hier an ästhetischen Werten fehle." Maas sieht die Ursache dafür schon bei den Byzantinern selbst; sie hätten "das Schöne in ihrer Literatur nicht nach Gebühr gewürdigt und somit nicht jene Tradition geschaffen, an die das moderne Urteil anzuschließen pflegt."

⁴ Zu dem wichtigen Problemkreis der Interrelation von Autor und Publikum in Byzanz sei – neben den übrigen in meinem Moskauer Referat (*Zur kommunikativen Funktion byzantinischer Gedichte*, in: XVIII Meždunarodnyj kongress vizantinistov. Plenarnye doklady. Moskva 1991, 415–432) erwähnten Arbeiten von HUNGER, KAZHDAN und anderen – insbesondere auf die immer wieder lesenswerten Überlegungen von H.-G. BECK zu Gültigkeit und Verbindlichkeit der byzantinischen Literatur (*Das literarische Schaffen der Byzantiner. Wege zu seinem Verständnis*, Österr. Ak. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl., Sitzungsber. 294,4, Wien 1974) verwiesen.

¹⁷ KAZHDAN – CONSTABLE, *People and Power*, 121.

¹⁸ C. MANGO, *Daily Life in Byzantium*, Jahrb. der österreichischen Byzantinistik 31/1 (1981) 353.

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